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SOURCE CREDIBILITY AS AN EVALUATION TOOL FOR EXTENSION ECONOMISTS.

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THIS STUDY SOUGHT TO APPRAISE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PRESENTING LIVESTOCK FEEDING INFORMATION BY TELEVISION. AUDIENCES OF "OUTLOOK" TELECASTS IN THE OMAHA AND SIOUX CITY AREAS RATED EXTENSION ECONOMISTS ON AN 18-ITEM SOURCE CREDIBILITY CHECKLIST WITH A SEVEN-POINT SCALE. RATING SHEETS WERE RETURNED BY 26 PERSONS AT OMAHA AND 40 AT SIOUX CITY, AND 11 EXTENSION ADMINISTRATORS AND AGRICULTURAL EDITORS ALSO RESPONDED. RATINGS WERE MADE ON SAFETY, DYNAMISM, QUALIFICATION, AND UTILITY, THAT IS, AUDIENCE CONFIDENCE, SPEAKER'S PERSONALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PRESENTATION, AUTHORITY OF THE SPEAKER, AND APPLICABILITY OF THE PROGRAM TO THE SITUATION. THE KROFF-VERNER ATTITUDE SCALE WAS ADMINISTERED TO 66 LIVESTOCK FEEDERS WHO HAD MADE SOURCE CREDIBILITY RATINGS, AND TO 205 OTHER LIVESTOCK FEEDERS. SOURCE CREDIBILITY SCORES RANGED FROM 5.24 TO 6.19. THE RELATIVELY HIGH RATINGS, ESPECIALLY ON SAFETY AND QUALIFICATION, INDICATED THAT THE ECONOMISTS WERE SEEN AS CREDIBLE INFORMATION SOURCES. AMONG RESPONSES TO THE 18-ITEM KROFF-VERNER SCALE, 27 INDICATED HIGH SATISFACTION, 20 INDICATED MODERATE SATISFACTION, AND NINE INDICATED SLIGHT SATISFACTION. RESULTS OF THE SHORTER KROFF-VERNER SCALE WERE COMPARABLE. HOME TELEVISION AUDIENCES PROVED BASICALLY HOMOGENEOUS IN INCOME, EDUCATION LEVEL, SIZE OF FEEDING OPERATION, AND RELATED CHARACTERISTICS. NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN PRESENTATION WERE NOTED. THIS DOCUMENT INCLUDED FOUR REFERENCES. (LY)

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Extension programs have been traditionally appraised in terms of the number of people attending a meeting, or by the different methods or techniques used by the Extension teacher. Blank[1] suggests that one component of successful Extension teaching is the teachers use of trustworthy data.

The image portrayed by the Extension economist may be of considerable importance in gaining acceptance of his message. Studies of the influence of information sources upon the audience indicate that when information is perceived as coming from a credible source, the information is more favorably received.[2] There is also evidence that people tend to place more credence in a source of information if they have had face to face contact with the source.[3]

Inspired by findings such as these the Nebraska Agricultural Extension Service has utilized a different approach to the appraisal of television programs. In an effort to appraise the effectiveness of presenting livestock feeding outlook information by television, the television audience rated each Extension Economist on a source credibility check sheet. Source credibility scores were obtained for each speaker along with general satisfaction ratings as measured by the Kropp-Verner attitude scale. An underlying assumption to this study was that if a farmer per-

ceived the livestock feeding outlook information coming from a credible source, then he would be more likely to accept and use the information in making decisions regarding his feeding operations.

Design of the Study

In cooperation with Extension Economists from Iowa and South Dakota, appraisals were made of the television Outlook programs at Omaha and Sioux City. The programs were essentially the same at both locations. The program consisted of a panel of Extension Economists who presented Outlook information which was followed by questions from livestock feeders comprising the studio audience. The audience consisted of known Extension cooperators invited by the County Extension agents in the area. In general the audience participating in the television programs were high school graduates and had fairly high gross incomes. Most of the participants reported feeding between 200 and 500 head of cattle per year and gross incomes of $40,000 or more. The participants also tended to operate larger farms than average for their section of the state. A total of 26 persons at Omaha and 40 persons at the Sioux City presentation returned source credibility rating sheets. In addition, ratings were obtained from 11 Extension administrators and Agriculture editors who viewed the television program at home. Source credibility ratings from all 3 audience groups were obtained for two Extension specialists. Ratings for three other specialists were obtained from the audience where the programs were broadcast.

The source credibility rating sheet consisted of 18 items, each on a seven point scale. Scoring was based on a 1 to 7 basis, with 7 repre-

senting a high rating and 1 a low rating. Ratings were made on four dimensions as follows: Safety, Dynamism, Qualification and Utility.

The Safety dimension consisted of four pairs of bi-polar adjuectives. These adjectives were believable-unbelievable, honest-dishonest, safe-dangerous and closed minded-open minded. The Safety dimension attempts to measure the audience cautiousness of the speaker. A low rating on this dimension would indicate that the information presented or the speaker was perceived by the audience as threatening or unsafe.

Personality characteristics of the speaker were measured by the Dynamism dimension. Adjectives used for this dimension included energetic-tired; confident-unsure; bold-timid and colorful-dull. The Dynamism dimension measure the speakers personal influence over the audience and the manner of presentation.

The perceived Qualifications of the speaker were measured by the adjective pairs; competent-incompetent, skilled-unskilled, informed-uninformed and effective-ineffective. This dimension measures whether or not the speaker is perceived by the audience as being qualified to present the information.

The Utility dimension represents a general rating of the extent of adaption of the program to the situation. This dimension was measured by six pairs of adjectives consisting of localized-not localized, interesting-not interesting, timely-not timely, only "how to" and "why" information and easy to understand-difficult to understand. Adjectives used in the scale are those which have been proven to be most representative of the dimensions measured. The source credibility rating technique has been tested and

validated in studies dealing with newspapers, political campaigns and other groups.[4]

Results

The mean ratings for all Extension economists appearing on the programs are indicated in Table One.

(Table One)

In general the economists were rated quite high on all dimensions. The scores ranged from a low of 5.24 to a high of 6.19. A score of 4 indicates a neutral rating while a score of 7 indicates the highest possible rating. The relatively high ratings indicate that the economists were seen as a credible source of information.

The overall ratings on the Safety and Qualification dimensions were slightly higher than for the other dimensions. These ratings indicate that the economists were seen as well qualified and trustworthy in their presentations. The overall rating on the Dynamism dimension was also quite high. This finding indicates that the speakers were seen as energetic, confident, colorful and bold in their presentations.

The Utility dimension received the lowest ratings of the four dimensions. However, the ratings were well above the neutral score of 4. Apparently the information presented was well adapted to the situation.

Source credibility scores were also computed for each Extension economist appearing on the program. Five different economists appeared on the two programs, however, only two were rated by all three audience groups. Some differences between speakers occurred among the 4 dimensions. However, no single individual scored highest on all 4 dimensions. Differ-

ences between individual scores in all dimensions proved to be non-significant at the .05 level when tested by the t-test. The audience tended to rate all speakers high and apparently perceived little difference in the speakers as a credible source of information. All speakers were Extension economists, thus their sources of information and training were essentially the same. Does this mean that the audience viewed the College of Agriculture as the source of information rather than the individual economists? Further research is needed to resolve this question.

Participants Satisfaction with the Program

The Kropp-Verner attitude scale was used to appraise the individual participants satisfaction with the presentation. Sixty-six of the livestock feeders who made source credibility ratings also completed the Kropp-Verner scale. The Kropp-Verner attitude scale consists of 18 statements which indicate extent of satisfaction. The statements ranged from "It was the most rewarding experience of my life" to "It was a complete waste of time." All respondents rated themselves as being positively satisfied with the presentations. Twenty-seven indicated high satisfaction, 30 indicated moderate satisfaction, while 9 reported slight satisfaction with the presentation. The high satisfaction ratings were consistent with the high ratings on the Source Credibility Scales.

A shorter version of the Kropp-Verner scale was sent to 205 livestock feeders who viewed the television Outlook programs from their homes. These feeders were also known Extension cooperators selected by the County

Extension agents.

The results of this study also revealed the television viewers tended to be highly satisfied with the programs. All the data collected to date indicates satisfaction with the television programs. However, one should remember that the programs were directed at a specific audience and were appraised by that same audience.

Demographic data was also obtained for those taking part in the television programs. The audiences were quite homogeneous in regard to income, educational level, size of feeding operation and other personal characteristics.

T-tests were conducted to determine if there were significant differences between personal characteristics and ratings on the Source Credibility and Kropp-Verner attitude scale. All tests proved to be non-significant at the .05 level of significance.

Conclusions

In general, the findings of this study revealed that the television audience tended to rate the programs and speakers as a highly credible source of information. No significant differences between economists were found on any of the 4 dimensions measured. The audience tended to be quite satisfied with the program as measured by the Kropp-Verner attitude scale.

The results of this study indicate that Source Credibility ratings may be a valuable supplement to our Extension evaluation efforts. This technique offers a more objective measure of how the Extension teacher is received and reacted to by the audience. This technique is applicable to the County Extension worker in the agent-client situation as well as to

programs conducted by television. Research is needed on the perceived credibility of information presented by other media such as newspapers, radio or meetings.

FOOTNOTES

1. Robert E. Rieck, "Evaluating Agricultural Economics Extension Teaching" Fournal of Farm Economics, Vol. 47, No. 3, August 1965, p. 826.
2. See James B. Lemert, "Dimensions of Source Credibility", paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism, August 26, 1963.
3. Robert J. Ames, "Successful Communications through Coordination", unpublished Report, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1954.
4. Lemert, op. cit.

TABLE I
MEAN CREDIBILITY RATINGS OF ALL ECONOMISTS BY
PARTICIPANT GROUPS

	Omaha	Sioux City	Professional Group	All Groups
	N 26	N 40	N 11	
Safety	6.04	4.99	6.08	6.04
Qualification	6.01	5.90	6.19	6.03
Dynamism	5.59	5.41	5.40	5.46
Utility	5.33	5.29	5.24	5.28

Scores have been inverted for clarity in presentation

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